



## Turkmenistan

### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2002](#)

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Turkmenistan is a one-party state dominated by its president, who continued to exercise power in a Soviet-era authoritarian style despite Constitutional provisions nominally establishing a democratic system. President Saparmurat Niyazov, head of the Turkmen Communist Party since 1985 (renamed the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan in 1992) and President of the country since its independence in 1991, legally may remain in office until his death, although he publicly announced his intention to hold elections between 2008 and 2010. Niyazov retained his monopoly on political power and on the Democratic Party, which remained the sole political party in the country. Emphasizing stability and gradual reform, official nation-building efforts continued to focus on fostering Turkmen nationalism and the glorification of President Niyazov. The 50-member unicameral Parliament (Mejlis) has no genuinely independent authority, and in practice the President controlled the judicial system.

The Ministry of National Security (MNB), formerly the Committee on National Security (KNB), had the responsibilities formerly held by the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB); primarily to ensure that the regime remains in power through the tight control of society and the suppression of dissent. In 2001 the President gave the Chairman of the KNB additional responsibilities to supervise both the military and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and on September 10, the President elevated the agency to a Cabinet-level Ministry. The MNB reportedly exercised wide discretion over issues such as exit visas and Internet access and worked to limit personal freedoms. The Ministry of Internal Affairs directed the criminal police, which worked closely with the MNB on matters of national security. Both forces committed human rights abuses.

The country's economy remained dependent on central planning mechanisms and state control, although the Government has taken a number of small steps to make the transition to a market economy. The Government estimated the total population to be 5.7 million. Most of the workforce was engaged in agriculture, which accounted for nearly half of total employment.

The Government's human rights record remained extremely poor, and it continued to commit serious abuses. The human rights situation deteriorated markedly after an armed attack against President Niyazov on November 25, which the regime characterized as an attempt to assassinate the President and effect a coup d'etat. The Government moved quickly against perceived sources of opposition at home and abroad, requesting that several foreign governments extradite alleged conspirators in the plot to topple the regime. There were widespread, credible reports of human rights abuses committed by government officials in the course of investigating the attack, including credible reports of torture. There were numerous violations of due process under the law. The Government denied all charges of abuse, but did not provide regular access to foreign citizens accused of participating in the plot. Government authorities detained hundreds of relatives of those implicated in the plot, some of whom were physically abused and denied access to medical treatment. Relatives of those implicated in the attack also lost their jobs, were dismissed from university, and were evicted from their homes without compensation. At year's end, many remained under house arrest and were not allowed to leave the country or travel internally.

Authorities severely restricted political and civil liberties. Citizens did not have the ability to change their government peacefully. The Government registered no parties during the year and continued to repress all opposition political activities. Security forces continued to beat and otherwise mistreat suspects and prisoners. Arbitrary arrest and detention were problems. Both the criminal police and the MNB operated with relative impunity and abused the rights of individuals as well as enforced the Government's policy of repressing the political opposition. Prison conditions remained poor and unsafe. The judiciary was not independent. Prolonged pretrial detention and unfair trials remained problems. Interference with citizens' privacy remained a problem. The Government held at least one political prisoner. The Government continued to demolish large numbers of private

homes; many displaced homeowners received little or no compensation for their loss. The Government sought to limit marriages between citizens and foreigners, purportedly to protect spouses and children.

The Government severely restricted freedom of speech and did not permit freedom of the press. The Government completely controlled the media, censored all newspapers and the Internet, and never permitted independent criticism of government policy. Academic freedom declined. The Government restricted freedom of assembly and association. The Government continued to place limitations on the activities of nongovernmental groups, including minority religious groups, most of which were unable to register with the Government. The Government exercised control over religious expression. Adherents of unregistered religions were subject to various forms of harassment including arrests and abuse. The Government restricted freedom of movement. In January it abolished the exit visa requirement; however, President Niyazov proposed reintroducing an exit permission regime for citizens at the Halk Maslahaty (Council of Elders) meeting on December 30 in response to the November 25 attack. There were no domestic human rights groups because of restrictions on speech and association. Foreign diplomats observed one trial proceeding. Domestic violence and societal discrimination against women was a problem. The Government generally gave favored treatment to ethnic Turkmen over minorities. The Government severely restricted labor rights.

## RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

### Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

#### a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

#### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

#### c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices; however, there were widespread credible reports that security officials frequently beat criminal suspects and prisoners and often used force to obtain confessions. There were credible reports that political prisoners were singled out for cruel treatment. There were credible reports that suspects in the November 25 attack against President Niyazov were suffocated to the point of unconsciousness, beaten, and subjected to electric shock torture to coerce confessions during pretrial interrogations by security officials. There were credible reports that authorities detained and threatened to torture relatives of those implicated in the attack to coerce confessions, that relatives of those implicated in the attack were beaten with water bottles to avoid bruising, injected with psychotropic drugs, and subjected to electric shock torture, and that their female relatives were sexually assaulted and threatened with rape. There were reports that prisoners needing medical treatment were beaten on their way to and from the hospital. Security forces also used denial of medical treatment and food, verbal intimidation, and placement in unsanitary conditions to coerce confessions.

There were credible reports that authorities used intimidation and threats during the interrogation of one former high government official who was sentenced in October (see Section 1.d.).

In September and October, there were reports that former high government officials were denied proper medical treatment while in detention (see Section 1.d.). One of the officials reportedly suffered a heart attack shortly after he was detained and did not receive adequate medical treatment until shortly before his trial 1 month later.

In March the Government initiated an internal investigation of the KNB and other security organs, allegedly in part because of allegations of human rights abuses. President Niyazov openly criticized several members of the KNB and other ministries for violating the law, including illegal searches of private homes. Some of those criticized for human rights abuses later were dismissed from their positions and stripped of their rank. Prosecutions were initiated against the senior leadership of the KNB. Additionally, the MNB has reportedly set 3 hours every Monday during which it would accept complaints from the public.

During the fall there were several incidents in which persons attempting to illegally cross the border to Uzbekistan border were shot, resulting in at least 1 death. The authorities said that bandits were responsible for the shootings; however, Uzbekistan border guards claimed that Turkmen authorities were responsible.

Prison conditions were poor, and prisons were unsanitary, overcrowded, and unsafe. Disease, particularly tuberculosis, was rampant, in part because prisoners who were ill were often not removed from the general prison population. Food was poor and prisoners depended on relatives to supplement inadequate food supplies. Facilities for prisoner rehabilitation and recreation were extremely limited. Some prisoners have died due to the combination of overcrowding, untreated illnesses, and lack of adequate protection from the severe summer heat. In Turkmenbashi prison, inmates reportedly were held 14 to a cell and were permitted visits from relatives once every 3 months. Relatives could bring food one time each month. Those who did not receive food from relatives suffered greatly. In Kizlkaya prison, near Dashoguz, prisoners were forced to work in a kaolin mine under hazardous and unhealthy conditions (see Section 6.c.).

In November several hundred inmates broke out of a pretrial detention center near the city of Tejen. Overcrowding and lack of food, occasioned in part by an unusually large number of detainees awaiting review of their sentences in connection with the upcoming presidential pardon, reportedly sparked the jailbreak.

There were three types of prisons throughout the country: Educational-labor colonies; correctional-labor colonies; and prisons. In the correctional-labor colonies, there were reports of excessive periods of isolation of prisoners in cells and "chambers." A new prison for hardened criminals and political prisoners, located approximately 42 meters from Ashgabat, was reportedly completed by year's end. Authorities allegedly threatened, harassed, and abused prisoners in an attempt to force some prisoners to renounce their faith.

Men were held separately from women, and juveniles were held separately from adults. Political prisoners were not held separately, and usually were sent to maximum security facilities. Pretrial detainees were usually held separately from convicted prisoners in detention centers; however, there were credible reports that individuals held in connection with the November 25 attack were held together with convicted prisoners in detention centers.

Although the Government permitted the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to visit a correctional facility in 2001, the Government refused requests from foreign diplomats to visit correctional facilities by year's end.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

Arbitrary arrest and detention were problems. On April 12, President Niyazov signed a law--proposed by the Parliament (Mejlis)--transferring sole authority for approving arrest warrants to the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, a position held by the President. Those expressing views critical of or different from those of the Government have been arrested on false charges of committing common crimes (see Section 2.a.).

A warrant is not required for an arrest. Citizens may be detained for up to 72 hours without a formal arrest warrant. A detainee must be issued a formal bill of indictment within 7 days of formal arrest and is to be afforded immediate access to an attorney once a bill of indictment has been issued. Under the law, a person accused of a crime may be held in pretrial detention for no more than 2 months, but in exceptional cases this may be extended to 6 months. However, in practice authorities often denied these rights.

The former Mayor of Turkmenbashi, Khalmamed Durdiev, was arrested in February and was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in May for misappropriating state funds, abusing his office as mayor, and committing fraud and forgery. His sentence prompted public demonstrations in Turkmenbashi in May (see Section 2.b.). On September 14, Durdiev was released from prison after the President stated that he had received wrong information about the former Mayor's alleged economic crimes. In December despite his release and apparent public exoneration by President Niyazov, the Supreme Court denied Durdiev's request for reinstatement of the property confiscated after he was initially found guilty.

In April the MNB arrested Geldy Kyarizov, former head of the national company Turkmenatlary, for numerous crimes, reportedly because of his disagreements with the economic and political practices of President Niyazov. He remained in detention at year's end.

In October a district court in Ashgabat found two former high-government officials guilty of fraud, misappropriating funds and three other minor charges (see Section 1.c.). Both received lengthy prison sentences and had their property confiscated.

In December authorities arrested a prominent civil society activist and accused him of illegally crossing the border and concealing a crime from government authorities. The purported crime was his attendance at an opposition meeting outside the country at which government authorities alleged that violent regime change was discussed, a

charge other attendees of the meeting rejected.

The Government held political detainees; however, the precise number held at year's end was unknown. Although the Penal Code prohibits a person from being sentenced twice for the same offense, on May 27 Keston News Service reported that Nikolai Shelekhov--a member of Jehovah's Witnesses--was sentenced a second time for refusing conscription based on his religious beliefs. Shelekhov had already served a full prison sentence for the same charge. By year's end, Kurban Zakirov--a member of Jehovah's Witnesses--remained in detention for refusing to swear an oath of loyalty to the President, despite serving his full prison sentence.

The Government used forced exile and internal exile as punishment during the year. In 1999 President Niyazov announced plans to deport to remote areas any government officials who were found to have committed crimes. In November the President issued a decree for resettlement of residents of Dashoguz, Lebap, and Ahal Velayats (provinces) to an area in the northwest of the country, stating that the plan would better distribute labor resources and prompt development (primarily agricultural) of rural areas of the country. Unconfirmed reports suggested that the resettlement plan would principally affect ethnic Uzbeks living in those Velayats (see Section 5). President Niyazov later called for accelerated implementation of the resettlement plan, stating that it would encompass those who had "lost the respect of the nation and disturbed social tranquility with their bad behavior," a remark widely interpreted as being directed at those implicated in the November 25 attack and their relatives.

During the year, there were reports that former ministers had been ordered to leave Ashgabat and were placed under house arrest in their family homes for various criminal accusations after being dismissed by President Niyazov. The President proposed that the officials, accompanied if they desired by their families, could work off their sentences in exile. Almost all prominent political opponents of the Government chose to move to Russia, Sweden, Norway, or the Czech Republic for reasons of personal safety; none returned during the year.

Religious leader Hoja Ahmed Orazgylychev remained in internal exile in Tedjen, after serving a prison term for unregistered religious activity.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, in practice the judiciary was not independent. The President's power to select and dismiss judges subordinated the judiciary to the Presidency. The President appointed all judges for a term of 5 years. There was no legislative review of these appointments, except for the Chairman (Chief Justice) of the Supreme Court, and the President had the sole authority to remove all appointees from the bench before the completion of their terms.

The court system consists of a Supreme Court, 6 provincial courts (including 1 for the city of Ashgabat), and, at the lowest level, 61 district and city courts. The Government abolished all military courts in 1997. Criminal offenses committed by members of the armed forces are tried in civilian courts under the authority of the Office of the Prosecutor General.

The law provides for the rights of due process for defendants, including a public trial, the right to a defense attorney, access to accusatory material, and the right to call witnesses to testify on behalf of the accused. When a person could not afford the services of a lawyer, the court appointed one. A person could represent himself in court. In practice authorities often denied these rights, and there were few independent lawyers available to represent defendants. There were credible reports that suspects implicated in the November 25 attack were not afforded regular access to their attorneys and that defendants' attorneys were not allowed to cross-examine other defendants in the case during the pretrial investigation.

In practice adherence to due process was not uniform, particularly in the lower courts in rural areas. Even when due process rights were observed, the authority of the government prosecutor was so much greater than that of the defense attorney that it was very difficult for the defendant to receive a fair trial. In general foreign diplomats were not permitted access to ostensibly open court proceedings; however, in October the Government allowed foreign diplomats access to the trial of two former government officials(see Section 1.d.).

Lower courts' decisions may be appealed, and the defendant may petition the President for clemency. In 2001 the President announced he would amnesty 9,000 prisoners; although a large number of prisoners were released, the actual number of prisoners released was unknown. On August 11, the President stated that in December he would amnesty 16,200 prisoners. The official list of prisoners who benefited from the annual presidential amnesty was published November 24 and included 7,616 prisoners, among them 162 foreigners of indeterminate nationality. The announcement was timed to coincide with the end of the Ramadan holiday so that prisoners could arrive home

in time to spend the season with their families.

At year's end, the Government held at least one political prisoner, Mukhametkuli Aimuradov; although his sentence was reduced by half in accordance with the 2001 amnesty of prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions; however, government authorities violated these rights frequently. There are no legal means to regulate the conduct of surveillance by the state security apparatus, which regularly monitored the activities of government officials, citizens, opponents and critics of the Government, foreign residents, and visitors. Security officials used physical surveillance, telephone tapping, electronic eavesdropping, and the recruitment of informers. Critics of the Government, and many other persons, credibly reported that their mail was intercepted before delivery. Mail delivered to the post office must remain unsealed for government inspection.

There are rules restricting searches of private homes (see Section 2.c.); however, authorities violated these restrictions on a massive scale during the course of the investigation into the November 25 attack against President Niyazov. There were credible reports that authorities searched homes of the accused and their families without warrants. Authorities confiscated property and evicted families of the accused with no notice and without court orders. Relatives of some of those implicated in the attack were evicted several times from different homes. Some relatives were told that they would be forced to relocate to other areas of the country under the rubric of a new resettlement plan proposed by President Niyazov (Section 1.d.).

In the past, authorities have dismissed children from school and removed adults from their jobs because of the political activities of relatives. In July and August, relatives of a high-ranking official reportedly lost their jobs in connection with the Government's investigation into the official's alleged criminal activities. In November and December, virtually all relatives of those implicated in the November 25 attack lost their jobs in connection with the Government's investigation. School-aged children of suspects and their relatives were publicly shunned; university students related to those implicated in the attack were forced to withdraw under threat of public condemnation. Authorities also threatened supporters of opposition political movements with loss of employment and homes (see Section 2.b.). In September President Niyazov reiterated a call for background checks that would span three generations in order to determine the "moral character" of university applicants and potential government appointees (see Section 2.a.). Bribery has become a main component of the admission process at prestigious departments in universities. Although officially free, admission to many faculties at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat reportedly cost several thousand dollars. Paying bribes for good grades also was a common practice.

On January 4, the Government continued to demolish large numbers of private homes in Ashgabat as part of the President's beautification program. Confiscations continued throughout the year. In some cases, authorities reportedly gave persons as little as 12 hours to collect their belongings and vacate the homes. Authorities erected additional monuments and luxury apartment buildings which remained vacant, forcing numerous families to find alternate housing. Citizens who built their homes without governmental approval were not offered alternate accommodations, despite their personal investment in the property, their length of occupancy, or the degree of hardship they faced as a result. Most had built their homes with the acquiescence of government officials, who extorted bribes to allow the construction. In some cases, the same government officials ordered the subsequent destruction of the homes. Others who had proper building permits were offered apartments or plots of land in compensation; however, such plots were often undeveloped and nonirrigated.

A June 2001 Presidential Decree stated that foreigners or stateless persons may not marry citizens without meeting several requirements. The noncitizen must have been a resident of the country for a year, own a home, be at least 18 years of age, and must post a "divorce bond" of \$50,000 (26 million manat at the official rate; 1.08 billion manat at the unofficial rate) with the Government. There were no reports of marriages in the country under the new law; however, there were reports that some individuals married abroad to bypass the new law. The requirements were purportedly instituted to protect Turkmen spouses and children.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, in practice, the Government severely restricted freedom of speech and did not permit freedom of the press. The Constitution states that citizens "have the right to freedom of belief and the free expression thereof and also to obtain information unless it is a state,

official, or commercial secret." However, in practice those expressing views critical of or different from those of the Government were arrested on false charges of committing common crimes (see Sections 1.e. and 2.b.). Criticism of the Government also could lead to personal hardship, including loss of opportunities for advancement and employment (see Section 1.f.). In December the presidential spokesman criticized international media representatives for their reporting on the November 25 attack against the President, urging them to base their reports solely on information released via official government channels. He threatened to deprive them of accreditation as journalists if they reported any "arbitrary phrases or evaluations" that were inconsistent with the Government's characterization of the event.

The Government prohibited the media from reporting the views of opposition political leaders and critics, and it never allowed criticism of the President. The obsessive focus of the media on President Niyazov continued during the year and amplified the cult of personality centered around the President. Criticism of officials was only permitted if it was directed at those who have fallen out of favor with the President, and public criticism of government officials was done almost exclusively by the President himself.

The Government funded almost all print media. The Government censored newspapers; the Office of the President's Press Secretary's approval was required for prepublication galleys. There was only one official Turkmen newspaper published in the Russian language. Foreign newspapers from abroad were not easily obtainable; on July 16, the Government prohibited delivery of all Russian-language newspapers into the country, citing high air-mail delivery rates. The Government used newspapers to attack its critics abroad. In order to regulate printing and copying activities, in 1998 the Government ordered that all publishing houses and printing and copying establishments obtain a license and register their equipment. In August the Government imposed a new rule requiring the registration of all photocopiers and that a single individual be responsible for all photocopying activity.

The Government completely controlled radio and local television. Owners of satellite dishes had access to foreign television programming. Use of satellite dishes throughout the country was widespread. In July the President cut all satellite-cable television service, reportedly as a result of the recent broadcast on Russian satellite channels of documentary films that criticized government policies. There were reports that satellite-cable television was restored; however, certain channels were no longer received.

All publishing companies were state-owned, and works by authors of fiction who wrote on topics that were out of favor with the Government were not published. The government-controlled Union of Writers in the past expelled members who criticized government policy; libraries removed their works.

The Government required all foreign correspondents to apply for accreditation. On numerous occasions in the past, the Government warned its critics against speaking with visiting journalists or other foreigners wishing to discuss human rights problems. There were reports that the Government harassed those responsible for critical foreign press items. In September the Government cut the telephone and Internet connections of a foreign correspondent, searched his home, and questioned neighbors about possible subversive activities.

Intellectuals and artists reported that security officials instructed them to praise the President in their work and warned them not to participate in receptions hosted by foreign diplomatic missions. The Ministry of Culture's approval was required before plays opened to the public, ensuring that they did not contain antigovernment or antipresidential content. In 2001 the President closed the state-sponsored opera and ballet in Ashgabat, claiming that there was no place for such institutions in society. Foreign music was still taught and performed throughout the country; however, there was no official support for non-Turkmen music.

While Internet access was available, state-owned Turkmen Telecom was the sole Internet provider. In 2000 the Government withdrew the licenses of all private Internet providers. There were credible reports that the Government took this measure in order to monitor Internet activity, particularly electronic mail. Internet access was prohibitively expensive for most citizens. There was evidence that the Government monitored access to opposition Web sites, based in Russia, through Turkmen Telecom.

During the year, the Government increased its already significant restrictions of academic freedom. It did not tolerate criticism of government policy or the President in academic circles, and it discouraged research into areas it considered politically sensitive, such as comparative law, history, or ethnic relations. No master's degrees or doctorates have been granted in the country since 1998. In 2000 universities began reducing the period of classroom instruction from 4 years to 2 years in accordance with President Niyazov's 1995 declaration that higher education should consist of 2 years of classroom education and 2 years of vocational training. The President also decreed that foreign languages in the public education system could be taught only in special language centers

and classes. Foreign language instruction also was available in private centers. Restrictions on instruction in non-Turkmen languages and limited availability of Turkmen-language textbooks contributed to the declining quality of education.

In 2001 "Rukhnama," President Niyazov's spiritual guidebook on Turkmen culture and heritage, became a basic school text (see Section 2.c.). As of September 1, each child is required to bring a personal copy of the Rukhnama to school. Teachers were discouraged from bringing alternative viewpoints into the classroom. The works of several writers, poets, and historians were placed on a blacklist because their portrayal of Turkmen history differed from that of the Government. According to an international human rights organization, in April 2001 the works were withdrawn from public schools and libraries. In December the basic English-language textbook for secondary students was withdrawn from public schools and libraries because the author was related to an individual implicated in the November 25 attack.

In September President Niyazov reiterated the call for background checks that would span three generations in order to determine the "moral character" of university students prior to entry (see Section 1.f.).

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly; however, the Government restricted this right in practice. Permits are required for public meetings and demonstrations; however, they rarely were granted and applications were screened carefully. Unregistered organizations, particularly those perceived to have political agendas, were not allowed to hold demonstrations. However, in May approximately 100 persons spontaneously demonstrated outside a Turkmenbashi courthouse protesting the guilty verdict of Khalmamed Durdiev (see Section 1.d.).

In August and September, students at Turkmen State University (TSU) distributed leaflets criticizing the Government at markets and schools. There were unconfirmed reports that the MNB arrested six TSU Students in September for distributing the leaflets; the students remained in detention at year's end.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association; however, the Government restricted this right in practice. No political groups critical of government policy were able to meet the requirements for registration. The Government used laws on the registration of political parties to prevent the emergence of potential opposition groups. The only registered political party was the Democratic Party, the former Turkmen Communist Party. It was extremely difficult for new nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register with the Government (see Section 2.a.). NGOs that could not register successfully with the Government often were forced to join an already registered NGO as a subgroup in order to gain the legal benefits of registered NGOs.

The Government does not forbid membership in a political organization; however, in practice those who claimed membership in political organizations other than the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan were harassed and, in the past, tortured.

Beginning in September 2001, social and cultural organizations without political purposes came under increased pressure by the Government. During the year, one NGO was legally registered. Authorities increased monitoring of NGOs and civil society groups around the country after the November 25 attack. Authorities refused to allow a scheduled conference on NGO registration to take place at a local hotel, which was instead held at a foreign embassy. In September a local security officer closely questioned a Peace Corps local staffer about the activities of their organization's volunteers. In the wake of the November 25 attack, authorities closely questioned host families about the activities of Peace Corps volunteers and stopped and searched a vehicle in which a Peace Corps volunteer was traveling.

Under the law citizens have the freedom to associate with whomever they please; however, authorities have fired or threatened to fire supporters of opposition movements from their jobs, removed them from professional societies, and even threatened them with the loss of their homes (see Section 1.f.). In addition, some citizens with links to foreigners were subject to official intimidation. Some representatives of NGOs and civil society activists were questioned by government officials after attending a reception in honor of International Human Rights Day at the residence of a foreign ambassador. On several separate occasions, security officials stopped vehicles and questioned Turkmen citizens as to why they were traveling with foreign citizens.

#### c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, as does the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which was amended in 1995 and 1996; however, in practice the Government did not protect these

rights. The law has been interpreted to control religious life tightly and to restrict severely the activities of all religions. There are no safeguards in the legal system that provide for remedy against violation of religious freedom or persecution by private actors.

There is no state religion, but the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. The Government has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition into its efforts to redefine a national identity. However, the Government placed some restrictions on Muslims. For example, the Government controlled the establishment of Muslim places of worship and limited access to Islamic education. In a meeting with religious leaders in January, President Niyazov stated that he had closed all but one institution of Islamic education to prevent what he believed was inappropriate instruction of Islam. He also stated that future annual classes of religious students would be limited to between 15 to 20 students a year, who would study at the Theological Faculty at TSU. The Government controlled the curriculum of this instruction. The state-supported Council on Religious Affairs (CRA) was part of the government bureaucracy and appeared to exercise direct control over the hiring, promotion, and firing of both Sunni Muslim and Russian Orthodox clergy, despite the fact that this role is not listed among the CRA's duties in the Law on Religion.

There was no official religious instruction in public schools. However, students were required to study Rukhnama at all public schools and institutes of higher learning (see Section 2.a.). Mosques were also required to keep copies of Rukhnama, and President Niyazov has been mentioned officially in Muslim prayer. The President attempted to use these teachings in part to supersede other established religious codes, as well as historical and cultural texts, and thereby shape citizens' religious and cultural behavior.

According to the law on religious organizations, all congregations are required to register with the Government; however, in order to register, a congregation must have 500 citizens (each at least 18 years old) in each locality in which it wishes to register. Authorities have interpreted the law to mean that a congregation with 500 members throughout the country cannot register; that number must be in a single locale. As a result of these requirements, the Government continued to deny registration to religious communities, except Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians, most of whom have succeeded in registering. However, there were credible but unconfirmed reports that certain congregations of Russian Orthodox Christians were prevented from practicing their faith despite the religion's registration with the Government.

Non-registered religious congregations were present in the country, including Bahai's, Baptists, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals, among others; however, the Government restricted their activities. Non-registered religious groups were prohibited officially from conducting religious activities, including gathering, disseminating religious materials, and proselytizing. This was a consequence of the Government's interpretations of the law rather than the law itself, which does not prohibit non-registered religious groups from gathering. For example, the Law on Public Associations specifically excludes its application in the case of religious gatherings. Nevertheless, government authorities regularly applied the Law on Public Associations when non-registered religious groups meet, even if the meetings occurred in private homes. Participants were subject to fines and administrative arrest, according to the country's administrative code, and once administrative measures were exhausted, they were subject to criminal prosecution. In such cases, the Soviet-era 1988 regulation on the procedure for conducting gatherings, meetings, marches, and demonstrations was applied, although gatherings in private homes were not within the scope of this regulation.

In November and December, local authorities, including intelligence and law enforcement officials, pressured a member of the Baha'i faith to abandon her beliefs, forced her to surrender religious literature, and threatened to resettle her to a labor colony if she persisted in teaching and distributing literature about Baha'ism to members of her village. The incident appears to have been locally isolated; there were no reports of similar harassment from other Baha'i believers. Members of minority faiths generally were able to quietly practice their faith as long as they avoided the attention of authorities.

There was a significant decline in the reports of government harassment of Baptists. However, on July 14, state officials visited the homes of two Baptist families and ordered their deportation. Authorities cited the expiration of the families' residence permits in November 2001 as the reason for the deportation order. Keston News Service reported that in January in Khazar, six members of a Baptist congregation were fined for holding "illegal services." Also in Khazar, in December 2001, there were reports that authorities threatened an elderly blind Baptist with eviction from her apartment after she held a Baptist service that had been raided by secret police earlier in the week.

In November 2001, police raided a Protestant Word of Life Church in Ashgabat. Approximately 40 persons were arrested after police dispersed the gathering held in a private apartment. Three foreign citizens who participated in the meeting were deported. The other participants subsequently were released, but authorities imposed large fines



on them. The Church members were threatened with dismissal from work, confiscation of identity documents, and long-term imprisonment if the fines were not paid. The owner of the apartment in which the meeting was held was threatened with eviction. There were no reports on whether the eviction was carried out. In December 2001, the Keston News Service reported that several members of the Church were rearrested for their participation in the November meeting; one member was reportedly sentenced to 15 days in prison. This report was not confirmed.

In January Baptist prisoner of conscience Shageldy Atakov was released from prison. Atakov had been in prison since 1999 for allegedly making an illegal transfer of automobiles in 1994. His original sentence of 2 years had been extended to 4 years and he was reportedly fined \$12,000 (62.4 million manat at the official rate; 258 million manat at the unofficial rate), an unusually large fine for such an offense. Atakov denied the charges and claimed that he was being imprisoned because of his religious beliefs. Following his early release from prison, Atakov was placed under a month of observation by agents of the MNB, after which he was given complete freedom of movement and allowed to receive visitors.

In November 2001, the Government charged the owner of an apartment for holding meetings of an unregistered religious organization in her home. The apartment owner was fined and evicted from her apartment. In January she left the country fearing for her personal safety.

Ethnic Turkmen who have converted to Christianity have been subjected to official harassment and mistreatment. Ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups who were accused of disseminating religious material received harsher treatment than members of other ethnic groups, particularly if they have received financial support from foreign sources.

Foreign missionary activity is prohibited, although both Christian and Muslim missionaries were present in the country.

The Government attempted to restrict the freedom of parents to raise their children in accordance with their religious beliefs.

Unregistered religious groups faced government harassment if they attempted to distribute religious literature.

In January the Government abolished the exit visa regime that restricted external movement by citizens. Members of unregistered religious groups were allowed to travel to other countries for religious meetings without interference, and there were reports of believers exercising this option. In May approximately 30 Catholics were allowed to travel to Azerbaijan, to attend a Mass given by the Pope. During the year, the Government controlled the number of persons allowed to participate in the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (the hajj), specifying that only 187 pilgrims would be allowed to journey to Mecca (out of the country's quota of 4,600). Transport was to be provided free of charge by the national airline. However, in January the Government abolished exit visas, in theory permitting travel to all those who wished to participate in the Hajj. The Government did not release statistics on how many pilgrims actually participated in the Hajj during the year; however, there were anecdotal reports of individuals participating even though the Government closely screened travelers.

Keston News Service reported that in December 2001, several members of Jehovah's Witnesses who had been imprisoned for conscientious objection were released; however, six coreligionists were not, reportedly because they refused to swear an oath of loyalty by placing a hand on the Koran.

The societal attitude toward conversion from Islam to any other religion generally was surprise, and often disapproval.

For a more detailed discussion see the 2002 International Religious Freedom Report.

#### d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Government restricted both freedom of movement within the country and travel abroad to some citizens of the country, and restricted the travel of foreign diplomats within the country.

Citizens still carried internal passports. These documents were used primarily as a form of identification, rather than as a means of controlling movement. The Government tightened restrictions on travel to border cities and regions, and declared large parts of the country restricted zones. Residence permits were not required, although the place of residence was registered and noted in passports.

The Government used its power to issue passports as a means of restricting international travel. In January the President abolished the exit visa regime. According to the decree, a foreign entry visa or an invitation to travel outside of the country would suffice. Travel of certain citizens remained restricted, including: Convicted criminals, those required to complete compulsory military service, and those with access to state secrets. There were also reports that local officials and some employers restricted individuals from traveling abroad by allegedly threatening them with the loss of their jobs if they traveled abroad. However, the President proposed reintroducing an exit permission regime for Turkmen citizens at the Halk Maslahaty (Council of Elders) meeting December 30 in response to the November 25 attack.

In July President Niyazov announced restrictions for citizens traveling to Iran and Uzbekistan, purportedly to control narcotics trafficking and other smuggling. The Government charged a \$6.00 (31,200 manat at the official rate; 129,000 manat at the unofficial rate) fee for travel; individuals must register their travel, indicating why they were traveling, the duration of the trip, and whom they intended to visit. During the fall, there were several incidents in which persons attempting to illegally cross the border into Uzbekistan were shot, resulting in one death (see Section 1.c.).

Most citizens were permitted to emigrate without undue restriction, although there were credible reports that authorities harassed those who intended to emigrate or who had emigrated and returned to the country for a visit.

The Government discouraged immigration by ethnic Turkmen living in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and other countries and immigration by non-Turkmen from the former Soviet Union (see Section 5).

The law provides for the granting of refugee and asylee status in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The law establishes procedures and conditions for recognizing refugee status and sets the legal, economic, and social rights of refugees. The country provides first asylum if the person is recognized under the mandate of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Government granted refugee or asylee status to some ethnic Turkmen from Afghanistan and allowed some Tajik refugees and migrants to reside in the country. During the year, 58 persons were granted first asylum. The Government cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. After the start of international military operations in Afghanistan, the Government agreed to increase its cooperation with the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other international refugee and relief agencies to assist refugees from Afghanistan. The Government also played an important role in facilitating the flow of humanitarian assistance for refugees who remained in Afghanistan.

### Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change their Government

Citizens did not have the ability to effect peaceful change in the Government and had little influence on government policy or decision making. The 1992 Constitution declares the country to be a secular democracy in the form of a presidential republic. It calls for the separation of powers among the various branches of government, but vests a disproportionate share of power in the Presidency. In practice President Niyazov's power over the state was absolute; despite the appearance of decisionmaking by consensus, most decisions were made at the presidential level, and the country remained a one-man state. A 1994 national referendum, which was neither free nor fair, extended the President's term to 2002, eliminating the need for the scheduled presidential election in 1997. In 1999 the Halk Maslahaty proposed, and the newly elected Parliament approved, a law making an exception to the constitutionally mandated maximum of two 5-year terms for the President; however, the exception only applies to Niyazov, as the country's first president, effectively conferring on him a lifetime term in office. During the year, Niyazov stated publicly that elections would be held between 2008 and 2010.

In the 1992 presidential election, the sole candidate was Saparmurat Niyazov, the incumbent and nominee of the Democratic Party. The Government announced the election barely a month before voting day, giving opposition groups insufficient time to organize and qualify to submit a candidate. The policy of the Democratic Party, according to its leadership, was to implement the policy of the President. In 1999 the Government changed the national oath to require that citizens swear personal allegiance to President Niyazov in particular, rather than just to the presidency as a general institution.

The 50-member Parliament (Mejlis) routinely supported presidential decrees and had no real independence. In the 1994 Parliamentary elections, no opposition participation was permitted. The Government claimed that 99.8 percent of all eligible voters participated. In 1998 President Niyazov promised that the parliamentary elections scheduled for December 1999 for a reconstituted Parliament would be free and fair and conducted on a wide democratic basis; however, the elections were flawed seriously. Although there were at least two candidates for each Mejlis seat, the Government selected every candidate, and there was no open discussion of the issues. The

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE declined to send an observation or limited assessment mission for the 1999 elections. Diplomatic observers noted many empty polling stations, extensive use of mobile ballot boxes, and numerous instances of family voting. Diplomatic observers noted low turnout for by-elections held in October.

In 1998 President Niyazov called for local councils and village leaders to have greater power and authority to deal with local issues; however, in practice even local leaders were selected and dismissed by the President and were reluctant to make decisions without his approval. During the year, the President replaced Hakims (governors) in four of the five velayats (provinces); in Balkan Velayat the Hakim was replaced twice.

There were 14 women in the 50-member Mejlis. Women served in the following positions: Deputy Chairman for Economy and Finance; Deputy Chairman of Textiles and Trade; Prosecutor General; Ambassador to the U.N.; and Deputy Minister for Social Protection. One woman served as a provincial governor (Hakim); however, the position of deputy Hakim often was given to a woman.

Preference was given to ethnic Turkmen in appointed positions in the Government, and there were 48 ethnic Turkmen, 1 ethnic Russian, and 1 ethnic Tartar in the Mejlis. The largest tribe--the Teke--held the most prominent roles in cultural and political life. Observers believed that the Government's preference for ethnic Turkmen officials reflects a desire to overcome the disproportionate influence of ethnic Russians during the Soviet period.

#### Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

There were no domestic human rights monitoring groups, and government restrictions on freedom of speech, press, and association made it extremely difficult to investigate and criticize publicly the Government's human rights policies. Government officials were not cooperative and responsive to their views. Several independent journalists based in Russia reported on human rights in the Russian press and had contact with international human rights organizations. On numerous occasions in the past, the Government warned its critics against speaking with visiting journalists or other foreigners wishing to discuss human rights problems.

There were no international human rights NGOs operating in the country.

The OSCE and other foreign diplomats were permitted to attend one court trial during the year (see Section 1.e.).

In 1999 President Niyazov established a human rights commission, which he nominally heads. The commission oversaw the work of law enforcement agencies, the military, and the judiciary, but it appeared to have little real authority. The commission continued to receive complaints during the year. The commission is subordinate to the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR) under the President, which has been in operation since 1997. The Institute's mandate is to support the democratization of the Government and society and to monitor the protection of human rights. The Institute maintained four full-time staff members to receive and resolve citizen complaints of arbitrary action. In principle, the Institute reviews complaints and returns its findings to the individual and the organizations involved; however, the Institute was not an independent body, and its ability to obtain redress was limited. Individuals seeking to register complaints were sometimes physically denied access to the IDHR. In October the Government published a book by the Institute containing a collection of Niyazov's speeches praising the country's human rights record.

#### Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution provides for equal rights and freedoms for all, independent of nationality, origin, and language, and further specifies equal rights before the law for both men and women. However, cultural traditions and the Government's policy of promoting Turkmen nationalism limited the employment and educational opportunities of ethnic minorities.

##### Women

Anecdotal reports indicated that domestic violence against women was common, but no statistics were available. The subject was not usually discussed in society, and the majority of victims of domestic violence kept silent, partly because they were unaware of their rights or because they were afraid of increased violence from their husbands and relatives. There were few court cases and occasional references to domestic violence in the media. One official women's group supported battered women in Ashgabat. Several groups informally supported victims of domestic violence in other regions. The law states that rape is illegal, and these laws were enforced effectively.

Prostitution is illegal, and it was a growing problem due to few educational and occupational opportunities for young women.

There is no law that specifically prohibits sexual harassment; however, a case could be tried under existing legislation. There were anecdotal reports that sexual harassment existed in the workforce; however, the Government did not discuss this topic publicly.

Women were underrepresented in the upper levels of state-owned economic enterprises and were concentrated in the health care and education professions and in service industries. Women were restricted from working in some dangerous and environmentally unsafe jobs. Despite such restrictions, women were well represented in a variety of sectors. Additionally, the military academy is scheduled to graduate its first battalion of female cadets in 2003. Under the law, women enjoy the same inheritance and marriage rights as men. However, in traditional Turkmen society, the woman's primary role was as homemaker and mother, and family pressures often limited opportunities for women seeking to enter careers outside the home and advance their education. Religious authorities, when proffering advice to practicing Muslims on matters concerning inheritance and property rights, often favored men over women.

There were only two officially registered women's groups, one of which was headed by the Deputy Chairperson of the Mejlis and dedicated in honor of the President's mother. Some NGOs also worked informally on women's issues. The Government did not acknowledge that women suffered discrimination and therefore had no specific program for rectifying women's disadvantaged position in society.

#### Children

The Government's social umbrella covered the welfare needs of children; however, the Government did not take effective steps to address the environmental and health problems that have led to a high rate of infant and maternal mortality. In 1999 the Government cut the number of years of basic education from 10 to 9. There was little difference in the education provided to girls and boys.

Education was free and compulsory; however, class sizes in the country continued to increase rapidly, facilities deteriorated, and funds for textbooks and supplies decreased. Approximately 95 percent of children between the ages of 7 and 16 attended school on a regular basis; approximately 1.3 percent of school-age children did not attend school. It was estimated that 49.1 percent of the student population were girls.

During the year, the number of teachers in the country was reduced in accordance with a presidential decree in 2000. Educators were concerned that this exacerbated the problems of already crowded classrooms and overworked teachers and further reduced the quality of education in the country. The ostensible reason for the reduction was to increase salaries for the remaining teachers; however, past similar promises have been unfulfilled, and teachers routinely were paid 2 to 3 months late. Wages for teachers and administrators were in arrears in many districts; this, coupled with the fact that salaries were low, has caused some teachers to leave the field and seek jobs in the private sector, increasing the ratio of pupils to teachers.

There was no societal pattern of abuse against children. During the annual cotton harvest, which typically lasts from mid-September to mid-November, many schools in agricultural areas were closed and students worked in the fields.

#### Persons with Disabilities

There was some discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, and the provisions of state services. The Government did little for persons with disabilities. Although some societal discrimination existed, many citizens engaged in activities to assist persons with disabilities. Government subsidies and pensions were provided for persons with disabilities, although the pensions were inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living. Pensions usually ranged between \$10 to \$30 per month (52,000 to 156,000 manats at the official rate; 215,000 to 645,000 manat at the unofficial rate). Care for persons with disabilities was provided at the local level. Children with disabilities, including those with mental disabilities were placed in boarding schools, in principle with educational and future employment opportunities provided if their condition allows for them to work; in practice neither was provided.

According to existing legislation, facilities to allow access by the persons with disabilities must be included in new construction projects; however, compliance with the legislation was inconsistent, and most older buildings were not so equipped.

## National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The Constitution provides for equal rights and freedoms for all citizens. Approximately 77 percent of the population was Turkmen; Uzbeks made up 9 percent; and Russians 7 percent. There were smaller numbers of Kazakhs, Armenians, Azeris, and many other ethnic groups. The country has not experienced ethnic turmoil since independence. However, Uzbeks reported increased discrimination, including a recent directive that only ethnic Turkmen can enter officer training at the military academy. There were reports that ethnic Uzbeks experienced discrimination in job opportunities. In November President Niyazov issued a decree for resettlement of residents of Dashoguz, Lebap and Ahal Velayats to an area in the northwest of the country (see Section 1.d.). Reports suggested that the resettlement plan would principally affect ethnic Uzbeks living in those velayats.

As part of its nation-building efforts, the Government attempted to foster Turkmen national pride, in part through its language policy. The Constitution designates Turkmen as the official language, and it was a mandatory subject in school, although it was not necessarily the language of instruction. The Government closed a number of Russian-language schools as part of the Government's policy of encouraging use of the Turkmen language.

The Constitution also provides for the rights of speakers of other languages to use such languages. While Russian remained common in commerce and everyday life, during the year, the Government intensified its campaign to conduct official business solely in Turkmen. In the past, the President publicly criticized some high-ranking government officials for their failure to speak Turkmen. Russian-language newspapers were not widely available (see Section 2.a.). There was only one official Turkmen newspaper published in the Russian language. Ethnic minority employees at government ministries reportedly were given until December 1999 to learn Turkmen, and some government employees, such as doctors and teachers, were dismissed from their positions because they failed to learn the language.

Members of ethnic minorities feared that the designation of Turkmen as the official language placed their children at a disadvantage educationally and economically. Non-Turkmen complained that some avenues for promotion and job advancement were no longer open to them. Only a handful of non-Turkmen occupied high-level jobs in the ministries, and there were reports that managerial positions were closed to non-Turkmen. Non-Turkmen were often the first targeted for dismissal when layoffs occur. As a result of these restrictions, more and more ethnic Russians viewed their situation in the country as deteriorating and sought citizenship in Russia.

## Section 6 Worker Rights

## a. The Right of Association

The Constitution and the law do not provide for the right of association; however, the law does not prohibit this right.

The Constitution and the law do not provide for the right to form or join a union. While no law specifically prohibits the establishment of independent unions, there were no such unions, and no attempts were made to register an independent trade union during the year. The Government controlled all trade unions. The Colleagues Union claimed a membership of 1.3 million; its member unions were divided along both sectoral and regional lines. There was also a registered Union of Entrepreneurs, which engaged in some philanthropic activities. Unions may not form or join other federations.

The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers against union members and organizers, and there were no mechanisms for resolving such complaints.

There was no information available on union affiliation with international unions.

## b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Constitution and the law do not provide for the right to organize; however, the law does not prohibit this right.

The law does not protect the right to collective bargaining. In practice in the state-dominated economy, the close associations of both trade unions and state-owned enterprises with the Government seriously limited workers' ability to bargain. The Ministry of Economics and Finance prepared general guidelines for wages and set wages in health care, culture, and some other areas. In other sectors, it allowed for some leeway at the enterprise level, taking into account local factors. The Government determined specific wage and benefit packages for each factory

or enterprise. Workers, including teachers, often went months without pay or received their paychecks late (see Section 5).

The law neither prohibits nor permits strikes, and it does not address the issue of retaliation against strikers. Strikes were extremely rare, and no strikes were known to have occurred during the year.

There were no export processing zones.

#### c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor; however, there were reports in 2000 of prisoners being forced to work in a kaolin mine in Kizlkaya prison, near Dashoguz, under hazardous and unhealthy conditions (see Sections 1.c. and 2.b.). The law provides for labor as a component of prison sentences; the prison system includes educational-labor colonies and correctional-labor colonies.

The Government prohibits forced and bonded labor by children. Some children worked in cotton harvesting in rural areas (see Sections 5 and 6.d.).

The Government encouraged persons to work voluntarily, particularly on weekends, in manual labor positions on civic projects.

#### d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment of children was 16 years; in a few heavy industries, it was 18 years. The law prohibits children between the ages of 16 and 18 years from working more than 6 hours per day (the normal workday was 8 hours). A 15-year-old child may work 4 to 6 hours per day but only with the permission of the trade union and parents. This permission rarely was granted.

Violations of child labor laws occurred in rural areas, particularly during the cotton harvesting season, when teenagers work in the fields (see Section 5). Children as young as 10 years of age were allowed to help with the harvest for up to 2 months. The Government strongly encouraged children to help in the cotton harvest, families of children who did not help could experience harassment by the Government. The Government has not signed ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

The Government prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, there were some reports that such practices occurred (see Section 6.c.).

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There was no minimum wage. In 1999 the Government raised the average monthly wage in the state sector to approximately \$90 (468,000 manats at the official rate; 1.9 million manat at the unofficial rate) per month at the official rate. At the Halk Maslahaty (Council of Elders) meeting in August, the President announced that wages would be doubled. The new wage rates scheduled to take effect in February 2003 increased the average state sector salary in Ashgabat to \$173 (900,000 manat at the official rate; 3.7 million manat at the unofficial rate), and in other regions to \$115 (598,000 manat at the official rate; 2.5 million manat at the unofficial rate). While the Government subsidized the prices of many necessities and provided others free of charge, this wage did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Most households were multigenerational, with several members receiving salaries, stipends, or pensions; however, many persons lacked the resources to maintain an adequate diet.

The standard legal workweek was 40 hours with 2 days off. Individuals who worked fewer hours during the week or were in certain high-level positions also could work on Saturdays.

During the Soviet era, production took precedence over the health and safety of workers; legacies of this system remained. Industrial workers often labored in unsafe environments and were not provided proper protective equipment. Some agricultural workers were subjected to environmental health hazards. The Government recognized that these problems existed and took some steps to address them, but it did not set comprehensive standards for occupational health and safety. Workers did not always have the right to remove themselves from work situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their continued employment.

## f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons, and there were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, or within the country.

The Penal Code prohibits prostitution, which is punishable by 2 years' imprisonment or hard labor. The penalty for involvement of a minor in prostitution or using force, threat, or blackmail to involve someone in prostitution is 3 to 8 years' imprisonment. The penalty for procuring persons for prostitution is 3 to 8 years' imprisonment with the possibility of confiscation of property.

There were unconfirmed and anecdotal reports of women from the country traveling to Turkey and the United Arab Emirates and working as prostitutes.

The Government did not have programs in place to combat trafficking in persons, but cooperated with the IOM in educational efforts on this topic.